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Gender Stereotypes in Advertising on Children's Television in the 1990s: A Cross-National Analysis

Beverly A. Browne

Using content analysis, the author examined sex role stereotyping in television commercials aimed at children in the United States and Australia. The goals of the study were to: (1) provide current data on level and content of gender stereotyping, (2) compare levels of stereotyping in two countries, and (3) assess stereotyping of self-presentational behaviors. Results are consistent with those of previous research in that boys were depicted as being more knowledgeable, active, aggressive, and instrumental than girls. Nonverbal behaviors involving dominance and control were associated more with boys than girls. Country-related differences in ratios of boys to girls in the commercials and demonstrations of licensed withdrawal, function ranking, and utilitarian contact were observed.

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Gender stereotypes are general beliefs about sex-linked traits (collections of psychological characteristics and behaviors characterizing men and women) and gender roles (activities differentially appropriate for men or women). Gender role depictions of women as dependent and emotional have been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes and having adverse effects on a wide range of behaviors (Bretl and Cantor 1988; Lovdal 1989; Sternglanz and Serbin 1974). Stereotypes in advertising on children's television programs have been a special problem because of their potential impact on gender socialization and, subsequently, children's views of themselves and other people (Bandura 1986; Bussey and Bandura 1984; Kolbe 1990; McNeal 1992). In the United States, where children may view more than 20,000 commercials a year, the opportunity for influence is substantial (Liebert and Sprafkin 1988). The possibility that children might acquire negative stereotypes through television viewing, therefore, has aroused concern among parents, educators, and members of the advertising industry.

A large body of research has investigated advertising to children, but important gaps are evident in the literature. In the last few decades, social norms for behavior, actual roles occupied by men and women, and media regulatory policies have changed. Have media portrayals of men and women changed also? Much of the research on gender stereotyping is dated. Indeed, Zinkhan (1994) cited gender stereotyping as one of the neglected areas of advertising ethics research and suggested that further research would be desirable. The issue of cross-cultural variation in gender stereotyping in advertising to children has been particularly neglected and few studies have examined such stereotyping in more than one country concurrently. Comparisons of stereotyping across nations could contribute to a better understanding of stereotyping and its relationship with cultural factors. Further, most studies of advertising content have examined easily counted variables, such as numbers of male and female actors appearing in commercials, rather than more subtle nonverbal aspects of gender stereotyping. Such focus excludes an important source of information about male and female consumers and their relationship to each other. The research reported here contributes to the literature by updating prior research, testing its

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generalizability with a cross-country comparison, and extending it by examining aspects of stereotyped self-presentation.

Television commercials were gathered from the United States and Australia, two countries that resemble each other in industrial development, language, and child-rearing practices. A rationale for the choice was that similarities in those areas should lead to comparable psychological characteristics and overt behaviors, and hence a single set of items could be used to examine commercials. Additional factors were the evidence of changing roles of women in both countries (Mackay 1993), ability to collect data from children's programming simultaneously in the two countries, and the countries' comparable media codes pertaining to children and advertising (Media Council of Australia 1993). Finally, each country has unique aspects of history and national character, including variations in personal values and interest in feminist issues, that could differentially affect advertising content.

Previous Research on Gender Stereotyping

Past research has yielded a consistent picture of stereotyped advertising content that has varied little over time (Macklin and Kolbe 1984). Portrayals of adult women in American television and print advertising have emphasized passivity, deference, lack of intelligence and credibility, and punishment for high levels of effort. In contrast, men have been portrayed as constructive, powerful, autonomous, and achieving (Bretl and Cantor 1988; Butler and Paisley 1980; Courtney and Whipple 1984; Kolbe and Albanese 1996). According to Goffman (1976), subtle aspects of self-presentation, such as pose, body language, and facial expression, also show gender stereotyping. His analysis of print advertising indicated that women often were depicted as shy, dreamy, gentle, likely to be manipulated, and helpless. Whereas men's body language denoted power, control, and dominance, women's body language indicated psychological withdrawal, submissiveness, and supplication. Goffman proposed that such posed self-presentations are based on social conceptions of ideal behavior and represent "ritualized" or culturally prescribed portrayals of men and women that inform the viewer about social relationships. Efforts to track changes in depictions of men and women in the 1970s and 1980s using Goffman's classification have indicated a general persistence of the traditional poses over less traditional

and more gender-equal ones (Klassen, Jasper, and Schwartz 1993).

Research on stereotyping in advertising to children provides a pattern of results broadly similar to that reported for commercials and programming intended for adults (Durkin 1985a; Kolbe 1990; Macklin and Kolbe 1984; Schwartz and Markham 1985). For instance, advertising directed toward children has been shown to feature approximately twice as many boys as girls, position boys in more dominant, active roles, and use male more frequently than female voiceovers. When characters have been shown in occupational roles, men generally work outside the home, and women are in domestic roles such as parent, spouse, or homemaker (McArthur and Eisen 1976). Commercial style and format have tended to promote stereotypes of women and girls as softer, weaker, and more passive by means of a less active pace, more fades and resolves, and softer background music (Welch et al. 1979). In addition, boys and girls typically manifest different personal and social characteristics, with boys being more autonomous, aggressive, and inventive (Sternglanz and Serbin 1974).

Children's Understanding and Use of Gender Stereotypes

Do children who are exposed to stereotyped content understand it? If so, what effect does it have on them? The overwhelming evidence is that children use non-verbal cues when developing impressions of others and even very young children are aware of the behaviors and roles appropriate for each sex. The development of such awareness is congruent with achievement of gender constancy (generally achieved by the age of seven) and increasing ability to understand cultural beliefs and norms (Emmerich et al. 1976; Martin and Halverson 1981). Children may not be aware of more subtle personality characteristics associated with gender until they are about 10 years of age. However, Kuhn, Nash, and Bruckner (1978) found that two-year-old children associated emotionality (crying), helplessness (needing and asking for aid), passivity, and gentleness (giving kisses, not fighting) with girls and associated aggressiveness (hitting, fighting), strength, activity (building, playing actively) with boys. More recently, Williams and Best (1990) found that five-year-old children thought women were weaker and more softhearted and men were stronger. Durkin (1984) showed four- to nine-year-old children commercial-length television clips and found that even the youngest children could isolate and describe sex-

typed behaviors. Six-year-olds were reluctant to say that Superwoman could do the things Superman could do (such as saving people) and believed other people would rate Superwoman's abilities lower than Superman's. They also thought men could give women pretty gifts, but not the other way around, and that women could be expected to engage in more passive activities such as staying home and washing up. Huston et al. (1984) found that elementary school children were able to understand the gender-typed connotations of format features and expected them to be consistent with the typing of the products advertised. If a commercial featured a product designed for a boy, children expected more activity and louder sound effects than they expected with a product designed for a girl.

Studies of the actual effects of stereotyping shown on television demonstrate that, though parents can exert modifying influences (Ward, Wackman, and Wartella 1977), televised images influence children's values, self-esteem, and product preferences. For instance, Tan (1979) found that teenage girls who viewed beauty commercials expressed stronger beliefs in the importance of beauty for women and were more worried about their attractiveness to men than a control group who watched nonstereotyped material. Subsequent research (Martin and Gentry 1997; Martin and Kennedy 1993) indicates that, when female adolescents and preadolescents compare themselves with models in ads, the comparisons may result in altered self-perceptions of physical attractiveness and sometimes lower self-esteem. Studies also suggest that children as young as four years of age are likely to choose gender-typed toys when they have seen them modeled on television by same-sex children (Ruble, Balaban, and Cooper 1981). Hence, children tend to accept sex stereotypes, identify with the stereotypical role of their gender, and punish other children, especially boys, that exhibit cross-gender behaviors and traits (Durkin 1985b; Frueh and McGhee 1975.) Nevertheless, Kolbe and Muehling (1995) found that those tendencies may not always affect product preferences. In their study, cross-role portrayals broadened children's conceptions of the appropriate user of the advertised product so that boys who saw girls playing with a stereotypically male toy redefined the toy as appropriate for both genders.

Cultural Variations in Stereotyping

Research indicates that the process of acquiring stereotypes is universal across cultures, though the

degree to which children in different countries hold stereotypical views of men and women is not. Williams and Best (1990), in a series of studies involving 24 countries, found the same sequence of gender-stereotype learning in all countries, but found country-related variations in the number and kind of traits ascribed to men and women. Australian and American gender stereotypes were relatively similar, but not identical, in terms of the characteristics associated with each gender and the favorability of those traits. Overall, stereotyping tended to be correlated with the country's religious orientation, urbanization, and the availability of education for women. In general, lower levels of urbanization and education were associated with adherence to more traditional gender roles. Religious orientation was associated with relative favorability of male and female stereotypes and their differentiation with respect to adult and child functions.

The relatively few studies that have compared levels of stereotyping in the commercials of the countries investigated here have yielded inconsistent results. Gilly (1988), in a cross-cultural content analysis, examined commercials aimed at adults in the United States, Mexico, and Australia. She found no significant gender differences for several variables including product advertised, employment status, use as a spokesperson, credibility, and activity level in Australian ads, but did find gender differences in American and Mexican ads. Edgar and McPhee (1974) examined American Airlines magazine ads in the United States and Australia and found more traditional roles portrayed in the Australian ads. Peck (1979) looked exclusively at commercials aimed at children in Australia and concluded that the level of stereotyping was similar to that observed in the United States. His conclusion was based on the ratio of male to female characters (a ratio of seven to one), the frequency with which male characters played major roles in the commercial, and small incidence of female voiceovers (6% of the total). More recently, Mazzella et al. (1992) found systematic differences between portrayals of men and women on Australian television and concluded that the differences were similar to those found in studies in North America and Great Britain.

Hypotheses

Because much of the stereotyping research is dated, an attempt was made to determine current levels of gender stereotyping in commercials targeting chil-

dren. Previous content analyses (Klassen, Jasper, and Schwartz 1993; Macklin and Kolbe 1984) showed consistency in gender stereotyping in past decades, but realization of the possible negative consequences of stereotyping in advertising in recent years was expected to be reflected in a reduction of stereotyped content. Hence, gender ratios would be more equal, the roles of adult characters would be less traditional, and there would be less difference in instrumentality between boys and girls than previous research has shown. Similar changes were expected in voiceovers, gender of spokespersons, and relative activity in commercials, especially ones for products that are not sex-typed.

H1: Gender portrayals in TV commercials have less stereotyped content than has been indicated by previous research.

The relationship between the country where the commercial appeared and the incidence of gender stereotypes also was examined. Previous evidence indicates that the level of stereotyping differs between countries despite the many cross-cultural similarities in the traits ascribed to men and women (Williams and Best 1990). Though evidence is inconsistent (Gilly 1988; Mazzella et al. 1992; Peck 1979), at least one comparative study of American and Australian commercials targeting adults (Gilly 1988) indicated lower levels of stereotyping for the latter. In addition, the relatively recent attention to women's issues in Australia (Mackay 1993) may create greater sensitivity to the issue of stereotyping in advertising. Hence, commercials on American television were expected to contain higher levels of stereotyping than those appearing on Australian television.

H2: Ratios of male and female characters, voiceovers, product usage, credibility, activity, aggression, roles occupied and format characteristics in TV commercials are more consistent with traditional gender stereotypes in the United States than in Australia.

Body language indicating differing levels of withdrawal, dominance, subordination, and administrative prerogative (Goffman 1976) were examined. Williams and Best (1990) have demonstrated pancultural similarities in the traits traditionally ascribed to men (such as dominance, activity, and instrumentality) and women (such as, deference, nurturance, and abasement). Therefore, self-presentations were expected to differ between boys and girls but not between countries.

H3a: Stereotyped body language in TV commercials does not differ between countries.

H3b: In a total sample, girls exhibit more withdrawal behaviors (such as shyness, eye or head aversion, snuggling, and hiding) than boys.

H3c: Boys exhibit more dominance behaviors and girls exhibit more deference behaviors.

H3d: Boys engage in more verbal and physical directing than girls.

H3e: Girls exhibit more gentle touching of people and objects and boys exhibit more direct manipulation of people and things.

H3f: Adults' self-presentations are more ritualized than children's.

Method

Commercials for the study were videotaped during Saturday morning cartoon programming in continuous three-hour blocks between 8 and 11 o'clock. The commercials appeared on three stations in Sydney (n=254) and on three stations in the northwestern United States (n=317) in the same time slots. Because different products tend to dominate commercial time before and after Christmas, commercials were videotaped during both periods. Taping of the pre-Christmas commercials began in late October. Taping of the post-Christmas material began in late December and ended in February. Data collection was completed in 1995.

To obtain a sample of unique advertisements, repetitions and commercials in which the gender of the figures or the voiceovers could not be determined were eliminated. One aim of eliminating repetitions was to limit the effect of major American advertisers, who might employ global advertisements, in the Australian sample. Animated commercials were not eliminated because most cartoon characters have an obvious gender detectable by name, physical features, voice, or clothing. Commercials promoting television programming were dropped from the sample if they contained segments of actual programming that would confuse program and advertising content. The final sample consisted of 298 ads, of which 150 were Australian (50.3%) and 148 were American (49.7%).

Content analysis was used to examine the advertising (Kassarjian 1977; Kolbe and Burnett 1991; Krippendorff 1981; Webber 1990). Variables were drawn from previous research on gender stereotyp-

ing in commercials. Before being included on the coding form, they were pretested to ensure that they adequately reflected the content of the commercials. Definitions of the variables other than the self-presentational variables are listed in Table 1. Degree of aggression, activity, loudness of sound effects and speech, and frequency of scene changes in each commercial were rated on a Likert-type scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high). Other variables were categorized and each occurrence was counted.

Goffman's (1976) behavioral typology, involving analysis of the pose and facial expression that constitute the "display" and inform the viewer about the social identity, mood, and intent of characters portrayed, was adapted for examining sex role behaviors embedded in time. The original typology included five types of subtle messages conveyed by advertisements: licensed withdrawal, ritualization of subordination, feminine touch, function ranking, and relative size. Descriptions of the adapted categories are given in Table 2. Individual instances of the coded behaviors were tallied separately for male and female characters as they appeared in the sequence of the commercial. By the rationale that multiple indicators of a behavioral category (such as licensed withdrawal) contribute to intensity of display, each occurrence of an indicator (such as face covering or giggling) was counted.

The actual coding involved repeated viewing of the advertisements by two persons, one male and one female, who were hired for that purpose by the author. They were told that the purpose of the study was to find out about the kinds of commercials children in different countries see and to describe how children are portrayed in those commercials. To ensure that they could interpret the verbal and nonverbal information contained in the advertisements, instruction was provided (Costanzo 1992). Instruction included familiarization with the definitions of the variables to be coded, the coding sheet, and the video equipment. Written descriptions of all variables and pictorial examples of nonverbal behaviors were given to the coders so they would have similar constructs in mind as they worked. Coders were also given practice sessions in which they coded a set of commercials that was not part of the study. The author was present to discuss the definitions and answer questions about the coding procedures. To help ensure objectivity, the author was not present during the coding of the commercials that served as the data for the study.

The primary coders worked independently of one another with explanations of variables and visual

examples before them. In addition, a second pair of judges, working together and resolving disputes by discussion, examined the commercials to ensure accuracy (Krippendorff 1980). For example, if either of the primary coders had claimed that the central character was male and no male characters appeared in the advertisement, the coding was deemed inaccurate and adjusted. The interrater reliability of the coding for the major variables is reported in Table 3.

Results

Content of Commercials

Analysis of stereotyping in the total sample of commercials showed little change from that found in previous research. Commercials contained more male figures than female figures; however, the male-to-female ratio increased with age. Commercials containing elementary school children had 43% girls and 56% boys ($\chi^2=5.88$, d.f.=1, $p<.05$). Commercials containing teenagers had a much more disparate gender ratio with 29% girls and 70% boys ($\chi^2=43.62$, d.f.=1, $p<.0001$). The proportions for adults were relatively similar to those for teenagers (38.1% women and 61.9% men). The difference is significant ($\chi^2=12.08$, d.f.=1, $p<.001$). Commercials of both countries featured predominantly male voiceovers, more than 64% (189 commercials). That was true for commercials primarily targeting boys and also for commercials featuring gender-neutral products (85% of commercials in that category). Female voiceovers were used in less than 16% of commercials ($n=46$), primarily where girls, preschool children, or mothers were the target. Analysis of male and female voiceovers in relation to the gender of the characters shown using the product produced significant differences ($\chi^2=128.78$, d.f.=2, $p<.0001$), indicating that, regardless of gender of the person demonstrating the product, voiceovers were more frequently male.

In commercials containing both boys and girls, boys were significantly more likely to demonstrate and/or explain the product (61.4% of all commercials) even when the product itself was not sex-typed ($\chi^2=29.81$, d.f.=2, $p<.0001$). Girls were never shown using products designed for boys (e.g., guns or trucks) regardless of country, and were less frequently depicted using products that were not sex-typed (appearing in 15 commercials vs. 70 for boys). No commercials showed boys using products targeted for girls.

Adult roles presented to children were examined by combining the roles occupied by adults into tradition-

Table 1
Descriptions of Variables

<i>Execution style</i>	Execution refers how the message is presented. Execution styles include presenting the product by itself, using cartoons, using live people, and a mixture of these presentations.
<i>Argument type</i>	The argument is the reason given for purchase. Rational arguments contain facts about quality, reliability, performance, safety, value, or economy. Emotional arguments arouse feelings. Moral arguments direct attention to what is right or good.
<i>Credibility</i>	Credibility is whether the central figures are believable or likable. Sources of credibility are being an authority on a subject, being a person who might have used the item promoted, and appearing sincere or honest.
<i>Activity^a</i>	Activity refers to whether the characters are busy and doing a lot or are passive and quiet.
<i>Aggression^a</i>	Aggression is acting against another person or thing: hitting, throwing, grabbing, loud or abusive talk, face making, and determined behavior (as in aggressively pursuing a goal).
<i>Frequency of scene change^a</i>	Frequency of scene change refers to how often the camera switches from one scene to another and shifts angles or camera viewpoints.
<i>Loudness^a</i>	Loudness refers to volume of speech, music, and sound effects.
<i>Central character</i>	A central character is the child, adult, or cartoon character that appears most in the ad. There may be more than one or none. The product is not a character.
<i>Voiceover</i>	The voiceover is a voice (or voices) from an unseen source that describes the product and/or encourages product purchase.
<i>Product user</i>	The user is the person handling or consuming the product in the commercial.
<i>Product gender-type</i>	Products are gender-typed if most people would think they would be more appropriate for one gender than another. Male-gender-typed products are ones associated with use by boys; female-gender-typed products are ones associated with use by girls. Gender neutral products are ones generally thought to be appropriate for use by both genders.

^aActivity, aggression, frequency of scene change, and loudness were rated on a scale of 1= low and 7 high. Other variables were categorical.

Table 2
Description of Gender Display Variables*

<i>Licensed withdrawal</i>	The character is psychologically removed from the social situation or appears unoriented or in need of protection. Demonstrations of licensed withdrawal include shyness, nervous giggling, face covering, head or eye aversion, hiding or peeking out from behind an object, looking into space with an unfocused gaze and snuggling or nuzzling.
<i>Deference-dominance</i>	Deference behaviors represent a ritualization of subordination. Examples of these behaviors include head, knee, or body cants, child-like postures and displays of appeasement or mock fear. Dominance behaviors involve holding or restraining, assault, and space-occupying postures.
<i>Function ranking</i>	Function ranking refers to a character's performance of an executive role. Examples of behaviors indicating higher function ranking include giving verbal instructions (product explanations or other directions) and molding behavior through contact (as in pushing or feeding).
<i>Object contact</i>	Utilitarian contact involves object manipulation, grasping, and causing objects to "work." Feminine touch is when the character is seen cradling, caressing, or gently touching and object.

*Categories were adapted from Goffman's (1976) typology. The original typology also included relative size and position in the advertising frame. Those variables proved difficult to code in the moving sequence of the commercials and were excluded from the analysis.

ally female roles (homemaker, mother, and teacher) and traditionally male roles (professional, worker, and sports person). A two by three (gender of the target viewer by adult sex role) chi square analysis for nominal data indicated that significantly more traditionally male roles (79%) than traditionally female roles (21%) appeared in the commercials ($\chi^2=5.69$, d.f.=2, $p<.06$). The proportions of male roles in commercials containing only boys and those containing both genders were 82.4% and 82.8%, respectively. Traditional female adult roles appeared primarily in commercials containing girls (46.2% of adult roles in those commercials).

One-way ANOVAs on ratings for activity, aggression, frequency of scene change, and loudness indicated that commercials targeting boys were significantly more active than commercials targeting girls ($F_{2, 269}=4.29$, $p<.02$). They were also substantially more aggressive ($F_{2, 269}=32.84$, $p<.0001$). Aggressiveness among boys involved throwing, hitting, making faces, and using toys in mock efforts to kill or maim an object or person. Those actions were rarely observed among girls. Loudness and frequency of scene change did not differ with the target of the commercial (boy or girl), even though commercials targeting boys tended to be somewhat faster in pace ($F_{2, 269}=2.46$,

$p<.09$). Ratings of activity, aggressiveness, loudness, and the frequency of scene change of the commercials are moderately correlated (Table 4).

Characteristics of Commercials by Country

Table 5 reports the characteristics of the sample of commercials by country. Examination of the general characteristics showed no differences between countries in execution styles or in the source of credibility of the spokesperson, 86% of which were portrayed as users of the product. The overwhelming argument offered for purchase was emotional and focused on fun and enjoyment (82% of American commercials and 71% of Australian commercials). However, a three by two (argument by country) chi square analysis showed that Australian commercials employed more rational arguments than American commercials ($\chi^2=5.80$, d.f.=2, $p<.05$). In both countries, pre-Christmas commercials featured a high percentage of toys (50% of Australian commercials and 67.6% of American commercials); post-Christmas advertising tended to be dominated by snacks and other foods. Australian advertising contained higher percentages of commercials for adult products, primarily in post-Christ-

Table 3
Interrater Reliability of Variables Used In the Content Analysis

<i>Variable</i>	<i>n^a</i>	<i>r^c</i>
<i>Advertisement</i>		
Type (Institutional, product/service, public service)	50	1.00
Execution style (cartoon, live, mixed, product only)	50	.84
Voiceover (male, female, both, none)	50	.87
Argument type (rational, moral, emotional)	50	.77
Activity	45	.80
Aggression	45	.74
Loudness of sound/music	45	.48
Frequency of scene change	45	.57
<i>Character</i>		
Central character (adult, child, cartoon, other)	45	.90
Age (preschool, elementary, teen, adult)	50	.94
Basis of credibility (authority, user, other)	50	.99
Rating of amount of boy's activity	46	.72
Rating of amount of girl's activity	43	.74
Rating of amount of loudness among boys	42	.78
Rating of amount of loudness among girls	36	.82
<i>Product</i>		
Gender type (male, female, both)	45	.86
Gender using the product (male, female, both)	45	.89
<i>Self-Presentational Behaviors</i>		
Licensed withdrawal (boys)	42	.51
Licensed withdrawal (girls)	50	.79
Deference (appeasement behavior – boys)	42	.46
Deference (appeasement behavior – girls)	36	.65
Assertion (assault, space-occupying postures – boys)	42	.84
Assertion (assault, space-occupying postures – girls)	36	.89
Function ranking (boys)	42	.55
Function ranking (girls)	36	.61
Object contact (gentle touch – boys) ^b	50	1.00
Object contact (gentle touch – girls)	38	.92
Object contact (utilitarian – boys)	50	.73
Object contact (utilitarian – girls)	38	.90

^aNumbers refer to paired observations made by the independent coders.

^bBoys in advertisements coded for the reliability check engaged in no gentle touch.

^cAll correlations were significant at $p < .01$ or lower.

Table 4
Pearson Product Moment Correlations Among
Ratings^a

	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Aggression</i>	<i>Loudness</i>
Aggression	.66**		
Loudness	.62**	.44**	
Scene Frequency	.58**	.29**	.60**

^aThere were no significant differences between countries in these variables; therefore, the data are aggregated.

** $p < .01$.

mas advertising (36% of the commercials), than American advertising (4.7% of commercials).

Further analysis of depictions of boys and girls indicated minimal support for the expectation that the two countries have different levels of stereotyping. The majority of commercials in both countries promoted products that were gender neutral (such as snack foods and some toys), rather than products likely to be used specifically by one gender or the other ($\chi^2=15.70$, $d.f.=2$, $p<.001$). However, there were substantial differences between countries in genders depicted using the products ($\chi^2=13.28$, $d.f.=2$, $p<.002$). Though numbers of commercials depicting girls were similar in the two countries, approximately twice the number of boys and men were depicted in American commercials as in Australian commercials. Australian commercials also were more likely than American commercials to depict both genders in the same commercial (55.2% and 36.2%, respectively).

Self-Presentational Behaviors

Table 6 reports the results of separate two by two (country by gender) analyses of variance for the self-presentational variables. For the analyses, multiple occurrences of individual behaviors indicating licensed withdrawal, deference, dominance, and function ranking were recorded and then aggregated into indices. Means for the indices, representing the average occurrence of behaviors in each behavioral classification, are given in Table 7 by country and gender. Those data show large gender differences in self-presentation but smaller differences between countries. Gender differences are in the hypothesized direction with girls demonstrating more shyness, giggling, face

covering, and head or eye aversion and snuggling than boys. Boys and men were more likely to engage in ritualized domination behaviors (holding, mock assault, throwing) whereas girls were more likely to assume deference postures that conveyed coyness or bashfulness, such as lowering and tilting of the head or body and upward glances.

Men and boys were most likely to engage in executive behaviors (in all but ads directed toward very young children), describe or demonstrate product features, and advise product purchase. Highly significant differences were found in the amount and kind of contact children had with objects portrayed in commercials. Boys were shown as being more instrumental and more often engaged in behaviors that created action on the part of the advertised item than girls. They were more likely to push, pull, or press buttons to engage mechanisms, and manipulate or construct objects skillfully. Generally, boys were portrayed as more effective, more able to make things work, and, in ads featuring games of competition, more frequently "winning" than girls. Girls were more likely than boys to be shown caressing objects or touching them gently. In few instances did children, either boys or girls, request or accept help from another child or an adult. Student *t*-tests of separate behaviors indicated no gender differences in appeasement displays, mock fear, or hiding in either country.

Main effects for country were found for licensed withdrawal and utilitarian contact. Examination of the means indicates more licensed withdrawal behaviors for both male and female characters in American commercials than for those in Australian commercials. In addition, significantly more demonstrations of executive or function-ranking behaviors were present in the American commercials. Male characters in commercials appearing in the United States also engaged in almost twice the amount of utilitarian contact with objects as those in Australian commercials, though means for female characters in the two countries were not especially disparate. The interaction between country and gender for utilitarian contact is significant ($F_{1, 421}=9.24$, $p<.003$).

The differences between portrayals of children and adults were examined by computing difference scores between male and female characters for licensed withdrawal, domination/deference, executive behaviors, and product contact behaviors. Adult difference scores were compared with children's difference scores by means of a one-way ANOVA for each variable. The results indicated little support for the notion that adults exhibit more ritualized self-presentations. Only

Table 5
Characteristics of the Commercials by Country*

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>United States</i>		<i>Australia</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Type of Commercial</i>				
Institutional	3	2.0	13	8.8
Public Service	13	8.8	12	8.1
Product or Service	131	89.1	123	83.1
<i>Product Category</i>				
Toy	82	55.4	31	20.7
Snack food/candy	6	4.1	31	20.0
Cereal and other food	24	16.2	7	4.7
Clothing	15	10.1	19	12.7
Adult products	7	4.7	43	28.7
Other (e.g., services)	14	9.5	20	13.3
<i>Execution</i>				
Cartoon	10	6.8	15	10.0
Live people	95	64.2	114	76.0
Mixed animation/live people	41	27.7	19	12.7
Product only	2	1.4	2	1.3
<i>Argument Type</i>				
Rational	20	13.5	35	23.3
Emotional	122	82.4	106	70.7
Moral	6	4.1	9	6.0
<i>Credibility</i>				
Users, people like the target market	120	93.0	96	78.7
Authorities, sources of information	9	7.0	26	21.3
<i>Voiceover</i>				
Male	97	66.4	92	61.7
Female	22	15.1	24	16.1
Mixed	4	2.7	5	3.4
None	23	15.8	28	18.8
<i>Product Gender-Typing</i>				
Male	23	15.9	5	3.4
Female	22	15.2	16	10.8
Gender Neutral	100	69.0	127	85.8

*Frequencies represent numbers of unique advertisements. Repetitions were not included in the analysis.

Table 6
Summary of F Tests of Gender Display by Country and Gender

<i>Effects</i>	<i>d.f.</i>	<i>F-Statistic</i>	<i>Sig. F</i>
<i>Country</i>			
Deference	1, 421	<1	.48
Dominance	1, 421	3.24	.07
Licensed withdrawal	1, 421	5.01	.01
Function ranking	1, 421	6.76	.03
Gentle touch	1, 421	<1	.98
Utilitarian contact	1, 421	40.40	.001
<i>Gender</i>			
Deference	1, 421	26.79	.001
Dominance	1, 421	28.03	.001
Licensed withdrawal	1, 421	32.33	.001
Function ranking	1, 421	19.37	.001
Gentle touch	1, 421	39.59	.001
Utilitarian touch	1, 421	32.01	.001
<i>Country x Gender</i>			
Deference	1, 421	<1	.62
Dominance	1, 421	1.67	.19
Licensed withdrawal	1, 421	3.43	.07
Function ranking	1, 421	<1	.35
Gentle touch	1, 421	<1	.48
Utilitarian touch	1, 421	9.24	.003

the variable "molding behavior through contact" showed a significant difference between adults and children ($F_{1,103}=4.66$, $p<.04$). More physical directing was exhibited by men and women than by boys and girls ($\bar{X}=.34$ and $.06$, respectively).

Discussion

One aim of the study was to examine current levels of gender stereotyping in television commercials targeting children. With the exception of the two format characteristics, pace and loudness, the results are generally similar to those of previous studies and indicate substantial gender stereotyping (Macklin and Kolbe 1984; McArthur and Eisen 1976; Sternglanz and Serbin 1974). Boys appeared in greater numbers, assumed more dominant roles, and were more active and aggressive than girls. Gender role reinforcement was observed at the level of body language and facial expression; girls were portrayed as shyer, giggly, unlikely to assert control, and less instrumental. Though some characteristics (such as aggressiveness) may be

more common among boys, assigning others (such as instrumentality) to one gender or another represents a distortion of actual behavior. Certainly the numerical representations of boys and girls in the commercials are not consistent with real-world distributions. Sex-typing of the product, though influencing role portrayals in the commercials, cannot explain those variations because comparable results were obtained when the product was gender-neutral (likely to be used by either boys or girls). One might argue that current portrayals mirror social norms and reflect the interests of target markets, but changes in actual roles occupied by men and women in both countries make that argument increasingly less compelling.

Despite similarities in gender stereotyping between countries, Australian commercials tended to contain more nearly equal male-to-female proportions, more often depicted both boys and girls in the same advertisement, and less frequently portrayed girls as shy or giggly and boys as directive. Moreover, male characters had significantly more active interactions with objects in the American commercials than they did in

Table 7
Mean Scores for the Gender Display Variables*

<i>Behaviors</i>	<i>Australia</i>		<i>United States</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Deference	.72	1.63	.68	1.44
Dominance	2.77	1.01	4.00	1.15
Licensed withdrawal	.47	1.21	.59	2.01
Function ranking	.65	.29	.99	.44
Gentle touch	.00	.54	.00	.60
Utilitarian contact	2.82	2.00	5.27	2.77

*Means represent average occurrences of each classification of behavior per advertisement.

Australian commercials in comparison with female characters. Those results might reflect country-related variations in ideals of male and female behavior or indicate actual differences in efforts at counter-stereotyping. Children's advocates and advertising professionals in both countries have been concerned with its content, placement, and amount of advertising aimed at children. However, differences in levels of interest in the content of children's television, advertising codes of ethics pertaining to children's programming, and women's movement activity are possible explanations that warrant further research attention.

Policy Implications

In 1975 the National Science Foundation identified 10 public policy issues facing television advertisers that included television's impact on socialization, the influence of format and audiovisual effects, and the effects of source and self-concept appeals (reported by Liebert and Sprafkin 1988). More currently, self-regulatory bodies in Australia and the United States have advocated promotion of positive social behavior and avoidance of demeaning or restrictive stereotypes. The findings reported here suggest that, especially where stereotyping involves subtle behaviors, the effectiveness of self-regulatory guidelines may be limited. The importance of that limitation depends not only on the stereotypes presented, but also on demonstrations of children's willingness to accept stereotyped portrayals as real and use them as models for their behavior. Particularly in the areas of instrumentality and aggressiveness, greater attention to self-regulatory guidelines on the part of advertising managers would serve desirable social ends. For in-

stance, children and society at large could benefit from less aggressive and more nurturing media portrayals of male characters and more instrumental portrayals of female characters.

Television's influence on the acquisition of gender stereotypes is well understood even though the traits and roles associated with gender form fundamental schemata in human interaction. Our current understanding of the effects of attempts at counter-stereotyping indicates that short-term interventions are not likely to be effective, especially if they contradict children's current sex role knowledge (Durkin 1985b). However, televised messages about sex roles and traits that do not provide direct contradictions but instead open paths to new behavioral possibilities can be constructed. In addition, there may be practical reasons for presenting more realistic depictions of boys and girls. To the extent that counter-stereotyping presents reasonable possibilities rather than complete departures from social norms, more balanced portrayals could have benefits for both viewers and sponsors. Indeed, research supports the notion that counter-stereotyped presentations may actually have positive rather than negative effects on some products by making them acceptable to both male and female consumers (Kolbe and Muehling 1995), thus expanding potential markets.

Limitations

The study had several limitations. First, content analysis is susceptible to bias due to methods of data collection, interpretation, or analysis even when persistent attempts are made to eliminate it. The fact that some behaviors had to be examined separately for boys and girls may have cued raters to the real

purpose of the study, leading them to exaggerate the occurrence of stereotyping and overrepresent stereotyped behaviors. Second, human physical limitations in ability to record complex information in television scripts may have reduced reliability by affecting accuracy and interjudge agreement. For instance, the format features of loudness and pace had relatively low reliability coefficients, possibly owing to mechanical or definitional problems, which might explain why findings differ from those of previous research. Third, repetitions of advertisements were eliminated in the study, primarily to guard against excessive pollution of the Australian sample by major American advertisers in that market. Though using unique commercials is likely to increase the possibility of finding country-related differences and few were found, that sampling limitation may have influenced the findings.

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